

"At the annual fair of Jakuzk one sees none of the popular amusements common at fairs in Europe: there is not even the appearance of animation and bustle which might naturally be expected. The goods are not openly exposed for sale, and most of the purchases are effected in the houses or enclosures of the citizens. The strangers generally seek to [31] conceal from each other the particulars of their dealings, which are almost exclusively with the inhabitants, they scarcely ever having any transactions with one another. Almost all the Russian settlers in Jakuzk employ their little capital in purchasing, in small parcels from the Jakuti during the winter, a collection of furs, on which they realize a good profit at the fair. The Russians live entirely by trade, having abandoned all sorts of handicraft to the aboriginal Jakuti, among whom there are now excellent carpenters, cabinet-makers, carvers in wood, and even painters. The pictures of saints, and the carving and interior fittings in the new church at Jakuzk, are all by Jakuti, and are neatly executed."

24: Wrangell--34-35
116, 533, 782, 824

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(1820-23) 1842

Yakut

"Our way led over a hill covered with pines, and I noticed that several old trees near the path had tufts of horsehair fastened to their branches, and that a number of sticks were stuck in the ground near them. The leading postillion here got off his horse, plucked a few hairs from his mane, and [35] fastened them to one of the branches with much solemnity. He told us that this was a customary offering to the spirit of the mountain to obtain his protection during the journey, and that foot-passengers placed a stick in the ground with the same intention. This is a general practice among the Jakuti, and is even persevered in by many who have professed Christianity. My Jakuti sang almost incessantly. Their style of singing is monotonous, and rather melancholy, and is quite characteristic of this gloomy and superstitious people: their songs describe the beauties of the landscape in terms which appeared to me not a little exaggerated, and which I attributed at first to a poetic imagination; but my sergeant informed me it was customary thus to try to propitiate the spirit of the mountain by flattering encomiums on his territory."

24: Wrangell--36-37
116, 173, 224

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(1820-23) 1842

Yakut

"Their countenance and language fully confirm the tradition their Tartar descent. (1)

1. According to this tradition, their ancestor was a Tartar named Sachalar, who came from his own country on the other side of the mountains to Kirenga on the Lena, where he settled and married a Tungusian woman; the Jakuti still call themselves Sachalary.

They are properly a pasto-[37]ral people, whose chief riches consist in the number of their horses and horned cattle, on the produce of which they subsist almost entirely. But the abundance of fur-animals in their vast forests, and the profit which they can make by selling their skins to the Russians, have turned much of their attention to the chase, of which they are often passionately fond, and which they follow with unwearied ardour and admirable skill."

24: Wrangell--37

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Yakut

116, 147

"Accustomed from infancy to the privations incident to their severe climate, they disregard hardships of every kind. They appear absolutely insensible to cold, and their endurance of hunger is such as to be almost incredible."

"Their food consists of sour cows' milk, mares' milk, of beef, and of horseflesh. They boil their meat, but never roast or bake it, and bread is unknown among them. Fat is their greatest delicacy, and they eat it in every possible shape; raw, melted, fresh, or spoiled. In general, indeed, they regard quantity more than quality in their food. They grate the inner bark of the larch, and sometimes of the fir, and mix it with fish, a little meal and milk, or, in preference, with fat, and make it into a sort of broth, which they consume in large quantities. They prepare from cows' milk what is called Jakutian butter, which is in reality more like cheese or curd, and has a sourish taste: it is not very rich, and is a very good article of food eaten alone. "

24: Wrangell--37-38
116, 273, 276, 437

G-3

(1820-23) 1842

Yakut

"Both men and women are passionately fond of smoking tobacco, preferring the most pungent kinds, especially the Circassian. They swallow the smoke, and it produces a kind of stupefaction closely resembling intoxication; and if provoked when in this state, the consequences are often dangerous. Bran-[38]dy is also used, though the long inland carriage makes it extremely dear. The Russian traders konw [sic] how to avail themselves of these tastes in their traffic for furs."

"The Jakutian habitations are of two kinds. In summer they dwell in what they call urossy, which are light circular tents formed of poles and covered with birch-bark, which they strip from the trees in large pieces. These are first softened by boiling, and then sewed together; and the outside of the urossy, from the colour of the bark being white,, have a very pleasing appearance, and at a distance resemble large canvass tents. In the summer they wander about with these in search of the finest pastures; and while their cattle are feeding, they themselves are incessantly employed in collecting the requisite store of winter forage.

At the approach of that season they take possession of their warm jurti. These are cottages formed of thin boards in the shape of a truncated pyramid, and covered thickly on the outside with sticks, grass, and mud. A couple of small opening, which admit a scanty light, are closed in winter with plates of ice, and in summer with fish-membrane or oiled paper. The floor is generally of beaten mud, and is sunk two or three feet below the surface of the ground; but people in better circumstances have it raised and boarded. There are wide permanent benches round the walls, which serve for seats in the daytime, and for sleeping on at night; and they are generally partitioned off for this purpose, according to the number of occupants. In the middle, but rather nearest the door, is the tschuwal, a kind of open hearth with a chimney up to the roof, where a fire is constantly kept burning. Clothing, arms, and a few household articles hang round the walls, but in general the greatest disorder and want of cleanliness prevail."

"Outside there are usually sheds for the cows, [39] which in winter are placed under cover and fed with hay, and in extreme cold weather are even brought into the jurte; whereas the horses are left to shift for themselves as well as they can, by scraping away the snow to get at the withered autumn grass. It is only when they are about to make a journey that they are given hay for a few days previously."

24: Wrangell--39

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(1820-23) 1842

Yakut

116, 177, 342, 354

"The above-described habitations [RCH: the Yakutian yourts or jurti; see category 116, p. 38], though rude, are better adapted to the wants of the people than those built after the Russian fashion, a few of which are to be seen. In the construction of the jurti small trees may be used instead of boards, which is a great convenience; while the open fire in the tschuwal, by keeping up a continual change of air, is far more conducive to health than the close stove."

"Every tribe of Jakuti is divided into several nasèlji, each of which is under a knäsez or chief, by whom minor disputes, &c., are settled. More serious cases go before the golowa or superintendent of the whole tribe, who is elected from among the knäsez. The people often call in a schaman or conjuror, and have recourse to his incantations to recover a strayed cow, to cure a sick person, or to obtain good weather for a journey, &c., &c. "

24:Wrangell--39 [3]

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(1820-23) 1842

Yakut

116, 177, 771, 779

"The Jakuti have almost all been baptized; but, though a part of the New Testament, the Ten Commandments, and several of the canons of the Church, have been translated into their language, as yet the greater number have no idea of the principles and doctrines of Christianity; and their schamans and the superstitions of heathenism still retain their hold upon their minds."

"As a nation they are unsocial, litigious, and vindictive. An injury received by one of them is very rarely forgotten, and, if he cannot revenge it himself, he will leave the feud to his son. Their passion for litigation is excessive: they will frequently undertake difficult and expensive journeys, in a cause where perhaps the matter in dispute is not of the value of a rouble. Their unsocial dispo-[40]sition, which leads them to prefer settling by single families at a distance from each other, is strikingly contrasted with the cheerful and ready hospitality which they show to strangers. They very seldom settle in communities, and it is only along the route from Jakuzk to the Aldan, where the country is more populous, that such settlements are now and then to be met with; but beyond the Werchojansk chain, the solitary jurti are often hundreds of wersts apart, so that the nearest neighbours may not see each other for years. Such distances are far greater than can be required on account of pasture, and are rather to be ascribed to the disposition which leads them to seek solitude, and to avoid all social intercourse."

"The population [RCH: near Saschiwersk on the Indigirka River] consists chiefly of Jakuti, who during the summer tend their numerous horses and their few cattle in the best pastures, employing themselves at the same time in collecting a store of hay for the winter. When the autumn arrives they move to the river, and devote themselves almost entirely to fishing, the chase being quite a subordinate employment. Those who have neither cattle nor horses live entirely by fishing, and make use of dogs with light sledges to draw their fish and their firewood home."

24: Wrangell--65
116, 161, 651, 177.65
636.65

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Yakut
Russia

"In the whole Kolyma circle there are now 325 Russian peasants, citizens, and Cossacks, 1034 Jakuti, and 1139 Jukahiri and other races; in all, 2498 males, of whom 2173 pay jassak or tribute.

This jassak consists of 803 foxes and 28 sables, which may be estimated 6704 roubles, and 10,847 roubles in money, making an average of about eight roubles to be paid by every male of the Jakuti and other tribes."

"The vegetation is especially luxuriant in the albuty, or dried-up lakes, which are numerous in this district, and form one of the peculiar features of Northern Siberia. These flat valleys are occasionally filled with water by the overflowing of the rivers in spring, when they are converted into lakes of various sizes, all abounding in fish. The intense frosts of winter cause large clefts in the ground, by which the water drains off, sometimes in the course of a single year, sometimes in several. The rich alluvial soil thus exposed soon becomes covered with a luxuriant growth of the finest grass, and the Jakuti never fail to settle near these fresh pastures, so that most of the settlements in this district are called albuty. (1)

1. A curious phenomenon occurs in the lakes in the vicinity of the village of Alaseja. In the middle of the winter the water sometimes suddenly disappears, without any side channels being visible. In such cases a loud noise is heard at the time, and when the bottom of the lake is laid bare, large fissures are visible, occasioned by the severity of the frost."

"I made several excursions on foot to different albuty, twenty or thirty wersts off. In one of them, called Sul'gi Etar (horse pasture), I met with a Jakut eighty-two years of age, named after Lieutenant Laptew, who visited the Kolyma in 1739. He had married a Russian woman, and could not only speak Russian fluently, but also read and wrote it with ease. In spite of his great age, he was so healthy and vigorous that he used to ride long distances with the young men, drive the cattle to and from their pasture, and take his share in most of the country occupations. He was very fond of tea and of punch, which are very expensive luxuries in this place. I passed many agreeable hours with this unusually intelligent Jakut. He complained of the ignorance of his countrymen, who, he said, had been formerly more civilized; and that, before they separated from the other Tartar races to which they are allied, they had possessed written characters, and, consequently, means of intellectual cultivation [166] which they have since lost. He asserted that his tribe had once inhabited far distant southern regions, and in proof of it he quoted several popular sayings, in which gold and gems, lions and tigers, are mentioned, of which they are now entirely ignorant. He was unable to speak more definitely concerning their earlier condition and country, as such accounts have only been handed down by traditions, which have been in great measure lost since Schamanism has yielded to Christianity. He said that litigiousness, dishonesty, and deceit had increased, and complained particularly that the immoderate use of spirituous liquors (of which, by-the-way, he was rather fond himself) had caused such a physical

24: Wrangell--165-166

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Yakut-2

116, 165, 173, 178, 212, 577

deterioration in the race, that no one now attained to the age of a hundred years and upward, as was often the case in his father's time. He talked much of the severity of the climate, the frequent failure of the hay-harvest, and the ravages of wolves. I will here recount all that I could collect from his narrations and from conversation with his countrymen concerning their earliest history."

24: Wrangell--166-167
116, 161, 177, 233, 756, 847

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(1820-23) 1842

Yakut -1-2

"The Jakuti who live on the banks of the Kolyma are not the original inhabitants of the country; their predecessors were the Omoki, the Schelagi, the Tungusi, and the Jukahiri. The Omoki, who were settled fishermen, and the Schelagi, who were a nomad people having reindeer, have so wholly disappeared, partly from wars with intruders, and partly from devastating sickness, that their names are now scarcely remembered. The Jukahiri, also, who were once a numerous nomade race, have greatly diminished. Most of them, having lost their reindeer by disease, now live poorly as fishermen along the banks of different rivers; while a few, who have preserved their reindeer, have withdrawn with them into the tundras near the sea. The Jakuti alone have not only kept up their numbers, but have advanced very considerably in population, and [167] in the cultivation of the soil. To them belongs the merit of having introduced the rearing of cattle and horses, and other branches of rural industry, into a region where the soil, and still more the climate, appeared to forbid all such attempts, and thus securing not merely a subsistence, but some degree of comfort. They may be said to have rendered these inhospitable steppes accessible to the intrepid descendants of Jermak, who have brought with them Christianity, and rescued an ignorant and superstitious people from the delusions of Schamanism and its barbarous customs. (1)

1. It was a frequent practice to expose new-born female children in baskets, suspended from the branches of trees. Sometimes it

24: Wrangell--166-167
116, 161, 177, 233, 756, 847

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Yakut-2

happened that, before the infants perished from cold and hunger, they were found and adopted by strangers; and old women are still to be met with in families of which they became members in this way.

The Jakuti are now all baptized. A priest from Sredne Kolymsk visits these settlements every year. An ecclesiastic named Slezzow, who resided here twenty years ago, manifested great courage and zeal in abolishing Schamanism. Wherever he found any idols or heathen altars, he caused them to be destroyed by fire or thrown into the water, and none such are now to be met with. There are still, however, as I have noticed in a former chapter, schamans, who continue to have a few adherents, and are generally consulted, and even by Russians, in regard to finding a stray beast or discovering stolen property."

24: Wrangell--167

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Yakut

116, 619

"What has been said of the Jakuti of the Jakuzk district will apply to those of the Kolyma. Their language, their habitations, their clothing, and their modes of life, are the same; but the hunting weapons of those of the Kolyma consist only of bows and arrows, and a large knife called pal'ma."

"As their horses subsist during winter on the grass which they find under the snow, the Jakuti migrate in spring with their herds, in order to leave the pas-[168]ture in the neighbourhood of their winter-dwellings undisturbed. The number of horned cattle they can keep depends on the quantity of winter-forage which they are able to obtain, and nothing can exceed the industry with which they pursue this most important object during the short summer. Throughout the whole of the hay-making season they live almost entirely on kumyss, of which they drink great quantities. It agrees with them remarkably well, and they grow fat and strong with scarcely any other food. One of the greatest disasters which can befall them is a sudden and early winter, cutting short the hay-harvest. Such was the case the present year. A keen wind from the northwest set in on the 22nd of August, with a heavy fall of snow, which covered all the hay remaining in the meadows; and as only part of it had been stacked, the loss was very great. It was followed by such severe cold that the lakes froze, and troops of wolves came out of the forest and carried off above eighty cows. At the same time, the Kolyma was so unusually swollen that the fishery in a great measure failed. A winter of scarcity, therefore, seemed inevitable; but nothing appeared to distress the herdsmen so much as being obliged, on account of their insufficient store of hay, to diminish still farther the number of their cattle, so many of which they had already lost by the ravages of the wolves."

24: Wrangell--168

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Yakut

116, 609

"It was now time for me to return to Nishne Kolymsk. I parted from these kind people, among whom I had recovered my health, and who were cheerful and happy when I first came among them, without being able to offer them anything in their distress except the expression of my sincere sympathy."

24: Wrangell--192

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Yakut

116, 166, 511, 651, 177.16

Russia

636.16

"The Tschuwanzi and Jukahiri of the greater Aniu, from having had far less intercourse with the Russians than has been the case with the dwellers on the banks of the lesser Aniu, have retained much more of their original language, manners, and customs. The Lamuti and Tungusi along these two rivers have also lost their tame reindeer, and now live poorly on the uncertain produce of the chase and the fisheries. Nor are those Jakuti much better off, who have been brought by the government from the banks of the Aldan, to aid in transporting provisions and other stores to the fort which formerly existed on the Anadyr. Separated from the rest of their countrymen, they have forgotten even their language, and have assimilated to the Russians in manners, mode of life, and even physical appearance. They live almost exclusively by fishing, and their only domestic animals are the dogs which they use for draught.

The population on the banks of the Aniu has increased latterly, but this cannot be regarded as a sign of improvement in the condition of the people. It is caused by the influx of different nomade tribes, who, having lost their reindeer by sickness or other causes, have been forced to seek their subsistence in the neighbourhood of the rivers, like the rest of their countrymen. The number of persons in this district who still continue to lead a nomade life does not exceed 400. All the inhabitants are subject to a yearly tribute, which they pay partly in furs and partly in money."

24: Wrangell--192-193
116, 177, 431, 756, 771

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(1820-23) 1842

Yakut

"They [RCH: i.e., the population on the Aniuk River which includes Yakuts] have all been baptized, and conform to the usages of the Russian Church at least once a year, when the different settlements are visited by the priest of Nishne Kolymsk, for the purpose of solemnizing marriages, christenings, and burials, and of administering the Lord's Supper. The journey is a very difficult and laborious one, as it includes a circuit of many hundred wersts, at the worst season of the year, and in a wild and desert country. It is, however, a very advantageous journey to the priest in a pecuniary point of view, from the number of presents which he receives; it being not uncommon for him to return with two or three sledges laden with the most costly furs, as sables, ermines, foxes, &c."

24: Wrangell--193

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Yakut

116, 177, 756, 771

"Pagan superstitions have been a good deal checked by the introduction of Christianity, but the belief in the power both of good and evil spirits, and of the schamans, still keeps its ground, and, singularly enough, has extended itself to the Russians. I have even been assured, that a priest who was about to undertake a journey to Irkuzk, applied to a schaman to afford him protection by his art against any accidents on the road! Generally speaking, however, Schamanism has lost its religious character. With the Russians it is for the most part merely a mode of passing away the time, and they send for a schaman to occupy an evening in the practice of his tricks, just as in Europe people send for a conjuror."

"A Jakut, when travelling, wears only his usual in-door clothing, and at night spreads a horsecloth on the snow, which, with a saddle for his pillow, forms the whole of his bedding; his only covering being the fur jacket which he has worn during the day, and which he pulls off and puts over his back and shoulders, while the front of his body has scarcely anything to protect it, and is turned to the blazing fire. When he has lain for some time in this way, and feels so warm that he is near perspiring, he stops up his nose and ears with little bits of fur, and covers his face so as to leave only an exceedingly small aperture for breathing, and this is all that he requires in the most intense cold to keep from freezing during sleep. Even in Siberia the Jakuti are called iron men; and I do not believe that there are any other people in the world who can endure cold and hunger as they do. I have seen them frequently in the most intense cold of [289] this country, after the fire had long been extinguished, and when the light jacket had slipped off from their shoulders, sleeping completely exposed to the heavens, with scarcely any clothing on them, and their bodies covered with a thick coat of hoar-frost."

24: Wrangell--289
116, 151, 153

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(1820-23) 1842

Yakut

"They are also remarkable for the acuteness of their sight. A middle-aged Jakut assured M. Anjou that he had several times seen that blue star, pointing to Jupiter, swallow up another very small star, and soon afterward vomit it forth again: thus he had observed with the naked eye the immersion and emersion of one of Jupiter's satellites. Their memory and local sagacity are also very surprising, and are of the greatest use to them in their journeys through these extensive and unvaried wastes. A pool, a stone, a bush, a rise of ground so slight as to be hardly perceptible, objects which a European scarcely notices, are deeply impressed in their memory, and serve years afterward to guide them over the desert and trackless steppe."

"The people about Werchojansk are Jakuti, and their chief occupation is the care of cattle, to which the hilly country and the milder climate of the sheltered valleys are very favourable. There is also much less snow here than in other parts of northeastern Siberia, so that the cattle can be left out in winter, and find sufficient pasture. This is the more important, as from the very dry summers the growth of grass is never such as to afford a good stock of hay. There are, generally speaking, fewer lakes abounding in fish than in the Kolyma district; but some of them are so full of small species of fish about two inches in length that they may be scooped out of the water with buckets. These little fish, which are preserved for the winter by being frozen, furnish a very good article of food, pounded and boiled with the finely-grated inner bark of the larch-tree. Hunting is much followed; hares and grouse abound, and the country is rich in fur animals; elks, reindeer, black bears, wolves, musk deer, red foxes, ermines, wolverines, and squirrels of the most valuable kinds, are all numerous; but black foxes are rare, and sables are not found here. The musk deer (moschus moschiferus), called here kabarga, must be abundant, as a pound of musk is commonly sold for no more than from ten to fifteen roubles."

"The character of the Jakuti of Werchojansk has been injured by constant intercourse with their countrymen of Jakuzk, and litigiousness, quarrels, dishonesty, and a passionate love of card-playing are equally general among them both. Distrust of their neighbours induces them to keep their cattle at night in the jurte which they inhabit, the pestiferous atmosphere of which defies description. The Jakuti who live near the Kolyma are far more cleanly in their habits; they are better dressed, and their dwellings are more comfortable and neat; this is particularly the case in the settlements at some distance from the route along which the traders who [293] carry brandy pass on their way from Jakuzk to Kolymsk. "